

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 A-01 OPR-01 SY-04 OMB-01 AID-05 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

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R 181215Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1879

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 3241

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: CURFEW IN COLOMBO

REF: A) COLOMBO 2832, B) COLOMBO 3058 (NOTAL)

CINCPAC FOR POLAD: PLEASE PASS TO AMB VAN HOLLEN

1. SUMMARY: GSL IMPOSED 17-HOUR CURFEW ON COLOMBO DISTRICT NOV 16 - 17 FOLLOWING DECISION BY TRADE UNIONS CONTROLLED BY TROTSKYITE LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY (LSSP) TO DEFY BAN ON PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS. CURFEW ORDERED AFTER PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE GAVE ORDERS FROM SOVIET UNION (WHERE SHE WAS VISITING) TO ENFORCE BAN.

EVENTS SURROUNDING CURFEW FLOWED LESS FROM ACTUAL THREAT TO LAW AND ORDER THAN FROM CONTINUING RIVALRY BETWEEN LSSP AND DOMINANT SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP). LSSP HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY RESTIVE WITH SLFP APPARENT TURN TO RIGHT, WHICH INCLUDES SLOW-UP ON SUCH SOCIALIST OBJECTIVES AS NATIONALIZATION. PARTY'S CONCURRENCE IN DECISION BY TRADE UNIONISTS TO DEFY BAN WAS POSSIBLY PROBE OF SLFP STANCE. LSSP REACTION TO CURFEW HAS SO FAR BEEN RESTRAINED, DENYING ITS RATIONALE BUT GIVING NO INDICATION THE

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PARTY WISHES TO PRESS FOR FURTHER CONFRONTATION OR

TO RECONDIER ITS ADHERENCE TO UNITED FRONT COALITION. ONE POSITIVE EFFECT FOR LSSP SHOULD BE SOME REFURBISHING OF ITS CREDENTIALS AMONG SUPPORTERS AS MILITANT, SOCIALIST PARTY STILL READY TO CHALLENGE ESTABLISHED ORDER. END SUMMARY.

2. CITING WHAT IT CALLED A POSSIBLE "BREAKDOWN OF LAW AND ORDER", GSL IMPOSED 17-HOUR CURFEW ON COLOMBO DISTRICT BEGINNING ONE P.M. NOV 16. NO INCIDENTS WERE REPORTED AND RESTRICTIONS ON PERSONAL MOVEMENT WERE LIFTED ON SCHEDULE AT 6 A.M. NOV 17. CURFEW WAS, IN FACT, LESS A STEP TAKEN TO ENSURE SECURITY THAN DENOUEMENT IN SUBTLE BUT REAL TEST OF POLITICAL STRENGTH AND WILL BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE'S SLFP AND ITS UNITED FRONT COLATION PARTNER, TROTSKYITE LSSP. AGAINST BACKGROUND OF SHARPENING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES (REF A), LSSP'S TRADE UNION ARM POWERFUL CEYLON FEDERATION OF LABOUR, MADE PLANS IN LATE OCT TO ORGANIZE PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION AS CLIMAX TO LONG-SCHEDULED CFL CONGRESS. CFL REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO HOLD DEMONSTRATION, BILLED AS PROTEST AGAINST GROWING HARDSHIPS AND TO ENCOURAGE RENEWED COMMITMENT TO SOCIALIST GOALS, WAS PRIVATELY TURNED DOWN BY MRS BANDARANAIKE AS VIOLATION OF EXISTING INTER-PARTY AGREEMENT ON MAXIMUM OF TWO DEMONSTRATIONS PER YEAR. LSSP, SHE REPORTEDLY ARGUED, WAS NOT ENTITLED TO ADDITIOAL MARCH UNDER GUISE OF TRADE UNION ACTIVITY.

3. LSSP HAS BEEN UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE FROM PARTY AND TRADE UNION RANK AND FIL BFOR ITS ACQUIESCENCE IN MEASURES WHICH HAVE STEADILY CUT BACK URBAN LIVING STANDARDS. PARTY HAS ALSO BEEN DISMAYED BY APPARENT SLFP SHIFT TO RIGHT, AS REFLECTED IN INCREASINGLY POINTED ATTACKS ON LSSP AND PAUSE FOR REVIEW OF SENSITIVE ISSUE OF FURTHER NATIONALIZATION. CFL, THEREFORE, WAS ENCOURAGED TO GO AHEAD WITH PLANS TO DEFY BAN ON DEMONSTRATIONS, ANNOUNCING ITS INTENTION TO ORGANIZE PUBLIC MARCH. ISSUE CAME TO HEAD WHILE PRIME MINISTER WAS ABSENT IN SOVIET UNION, PRESSURE REPORTEDLY BEING PUT ON ACTING PM MAITHRIPALUOSENANAYEKE BY BOTH LSSP AND LEFT-CONFIDENTIAL

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WING CABINET MINISTERS TO LIFT BAN. SENANAYEKE CHECKED WITH MRS. BANDARANAIKE, WHO ORDERED FROM SOVIET UNION THAT BAN BE ENFORCED, IF NECESSARY WITH AID OF ARMY. SENANAYEKE THEN IMPOSED CURFEW JUST AS CFL RALLY WAS GETTING UNDER WAY NOVEMBER 16. PRIME MINISTER RETURNED TO ISLAND LATER IN DAY TO FIND SITUATION UNDER CONTROL.

4. INITIAL LSSP REASCTION HAS BEEN LIMITED AND

RESTRAINED, SO FAR CONFINED TO TRADE UNION
SPOKESMAN AND PARTY-CONTROLLED PRESS. ITS THRUST HAS
BEEN TO ATTACK MOTIVES FOR CURFEW, DENYING ANY
INTENTION TO DISTURB PUBLIC TRANQUILLITY AND
HINTING AT POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE LABOR UNREST. WHILE
MORE POINTED AND HIGHER-LEVEL COMMENTS MAY FOLLOW POLITBURO
ASSESSMENT OF WEEK-END EVENTS, THERE APPEARS LITTLE
LIKELIHOOD THAT PARTY WILL QUESTION NECESSITY OF
CONTINUED ADHERENCE TO COALITION OR ENGAGE IN TACTICS
LEADING TO FURTHER AND MORE SIGNIFICANT CONFRONTATION
WITH SLFP, AT LEAST FOR TIME BEING. DESPITE PUBLIC
SHOW OF BRAVADO AND AGGRESSIVE DEMANDS FOR MORE RADICAL
ECONOMIC POLICIES, LSSP'S POSITION HAS BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY
ERODED IN RECENT MONTHS. ANTI-LSSP SENTIMENT
WITH SLFP IS GROWING, AND WITH TEMPTATION TO MAKE
TROTSKYITES SCAPEGOATS FOR DOMESTIC TROUBLES. FOR LSSP
TO PUSH ITS DIFFERENCES WITH SLFP AGGRESSIVELY COULD ADD
IMPETUS TO DECLINE IN ITS INFLUENCE AND WIDEN EXISTING RIFT
WITH MRS. BANDARANAIKE. INDEED, LSSP - ORIENTED PRESS HAS
ADOPTED LINE CALLING FOR CLOSER UNION.
5. WEEK-END EVENTS CAN GIVE BOTH PARTIES SOME MEASURE OF
SATISFACTION: SLFP MAY BE CONTENT IN HAVING NIPPED IN
BUD ANY DESIGN BY ITS RIVAL TO ENGAGE IN "NIBBLING TACTICS."
FOR ITS PART, LSSP MAY HOPE THAT AT VERY LEAST IT HAS
REFURBISHED ITS IMAGE AMONG ITS SUPPORTERS AS
REVOLUTIONARY PARTY, THWARTED BY REACTIONARIES, BUT
STEADFASTLY PRESSING ITS DEMANDS.
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